



## SMALL AND LIGHT WEAPONS PROLIFERATION, VIOLENT CRIMES, AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Adewoyin, Solomon Ademola<sup>1i</sup>,  
David, Ekong Imeh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>National Examinations Council,  
Minna, Niger State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Divisional Police Officer (DPO) Akim Division,  
Calabar, Nigeria

### Abstract:

Small arms and light weapons are becoming endemic in Nigeria, and the rate of accumulation is increasing with their concomitant destabilizing effect. The thesis of this paper is to examine the role small and light weapons proliferation play in promoting violent crime and how it affects national security in Nigeria. Small and light weapons of various shapes, sizes, and colours has featured predominantly in most violent crime in Nigeria. These weapons have been used by unpatriotic elements to maim, harm, and destroy lives and properties in the country. Presently, Nigeria is undergoing series of violent crime such as armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping, vandalism, armed conflict, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, arson, rampaging killer herdsmen, etc., in which small and light weapons play a decisive role. These security breaches have resulted to loss of lives, destruction of peoples' homes, vandalization of business premises, and an increase in the number of displaced persons in the country. To check these problems, the paper recommended among other things that government should actively erect barriers to stem the flow of small arms into the country. Also, border surveillance should be strengthened, and sophisticated ICT and detective devices should be made available to law enforcement officers at the border. In addition, transparency and accountability should be taken into cognizance in the production and transfer of small arms, as well as weapons registration, to help stem the massive inflow and circulation of small arms throughout the country.

**Keywords:** arms proliferation, violent crimes, illicit drug trafficking, conflict, policing, militancy, national security

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<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [ademola.adewoyin@yahoo.com](mailto:ademola.adewoyin@yahoo.com), [dekongimeh@yahoo.com](mailto:dekongimeh@yahoo.com)

## 1. Introduction

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) are generally considered as a challenge to both national and international peace, security, and development. It is an issue of increasing global concern because of its proclivity to undermine global security, instigate and sustain conflicts, encourage brutality, rebellion and radical extremism (Malam, 2014; Ukwaiyi, Adewoyin, John & Ofem, 2017). Small arms and light weapons, which includes but not limited to AK-47, AR-60, double barrel guns, dane guns, man-portable and vehicle-mounted anti-personnels, anti-tank and anti-aircraft rockets, missiles, grenade launchers, rocket launchers, landmines, anti-aircraft guns, mortars, hand grenades and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), has featured predominately in most criminal activities globally because of its easy accessibility and flexibility. These weapons have been adjudged by scholars to have facilitated unprecedented number of violent crimes, which has impacted negatively on the security of lives and properties (Badmus, 2010). Access to these weapons by non-state actors have had an intense impact on the safety of lives and properties in Africa generally, and Nigeria in particular.

Nigeria is currently experiencing series of violent crimes, in which small and light weapons play a decisive role. Those engaged in armed robbery, cultism, kidnapping, vandalism, armed conflict, drug trafficking, cattle rustling, killer-herdsmen menace, arson, as well as highly specialized organised criminal syndicates, base their operational capacity and strength on small and light weapons. From the Northern to the Southern regions of Nigeria violent crimes of various nature have been witnessed, facilitated by the availability and accessibility to small arms and light weapons. These include insurgency and cattle rustling in the North; rampaging killer-herdsmen and arsonists in the Middle Belt, militancy, cultism, kidnapping and hostage taking in the South. According to Badmus (2010), the harmonious existence of various ethnic groups in Nigeria have been threatened by different forms of violent crimes such as kidnapping, conflict (ethno-communal, religious and political, as well as, pastoral and farmers conflict), insurgency, militancy, among others. These security breaches have resulted to loss of lives, destruction of peoples' homes, vandalization of business premises, and an increase in the number of displaced persons in the country. Migiro, Costa and Sylvain-Goma (2010), observed that the proliferation of arms undermines good governance and disrupts business and tourism activities. It also jeopardizes economic development and generally puts democracy and development at risk. Iloani and Sunday (2016), reported that between June 2006 and December 2015, a total of 94,470 deaths were recorded from fatal violence across the country. The report revealed that 2014 and 2015 recorded the highest number of deaths, accounting for 24 per cent and 18 per cent, respectively, of the total deaths recorded during this period.

Although, firearms are used in perpetuating the aforementioned violent crimes, it does not necessarily mean that they are the cause of such crime. Hazen and Horner (2007), identified security and personal gains as the two key factors that promote demand for small arms and light weapons in Nigeria. The former has such users as

official bodies like law enforcement agents; and subsidiary entities like community groups, corporate organizations, other groups and individuals who acquire arms by obtaining official licence. From the institutional sphere, the National Security Forces obtain small arms primarily for the purpose of law enforcement and protecting the country. The reasons for the procurement of arms by civilian populations vary and include: (i) Security as a result of the inability of the police to maintain law and order in a consistent and reliable manner, (ii) Threats to personal security, crime, communal clashes and land disputes, (iii) For community vigilante groups and ethnic militias, and (iv) For personal gain either individually or collectively through armed robbery, oil bunkering, cultism or clashes with other groups. Accordingly, personal gains have also been sought by politicians who arm youth gangs and use them as personal election campaigning tools. These arms have been identified to flood the country from many sources, both through local production, smuggling and importation (Fearon & Laitin, 2010).

The routes and sources of these weapons into the country remain a mystery. However, countries such as Chad, Benin, Gabon, and Niger, as well as, Guinea-Bissau and Cameroon have been listed among the flourishing routes and sources of small arms and light weapons into Nigeria. Other identified notorious sources include Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa, Bulgaria, Ukraine, Turkey, Serbia and Kosovo. Within Nigeria, Idi-Iroko in Ogun State and Seme in Lagos State are established notorious arms smuggling frontiers. Other notable arms smuggling frontiers in the country are the port city of Warri in Delta State and the border between the North-Eastern part of the country, Niger and Cameroon (Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States). The "industry hub of arms business" in the Niger Delta region is Warri. Its location in the Niger Delta region, as well as, the vivacious demand for small arms in the oil rich region of the country by militant groups, make this a logical place for the reception of shipments. A number of towns in South-South and South-East regions of the country are also notorious for arms trade. These includes Port Harcourt, Benin city, Asaba, Calabar, Aba, Onitsha, Enugu, Owerri, and Awka.

Although, there is no accurate and reliable information on the number of small arms and light weapons in circulation within the country. News reports and statements from security experts, police, and government officials give credence to the likelihood that the problem of small arms and light weapons proliferation is increasing. Agbiboa (n/d), noted that about one million to three million small arms and light weapons are in circulation in Nigeria. These weapons make their way into the country through the existing porous land borders and seaports. On arrival into the country, these weapons are transferred into the hands of armed groups, militia groups, black marketers, politicians, community leaders, and local vigilantes. However, a high percentage of small arms and light weapons currently in circulation in the country are in the hands of civilians. Roughly, about fifty-nine percent of arms around the globe are in wrong hands and in some places like Europe, the percentage is as high as eighty per cent. While, a reasonable percentage of these arms are used for legitimate purposes, a mind-blowing proportion of these arms are used to facilitate, prosecute and sustain violence.

The relationship between small arms and insecurity has been the object of contentious debates among scholars. While, some scholars argue that small arms are the direct cause of insecurity, others maintain that small arms merely serve as a trigger of insecurity or a precipitating factor. Despite this seeming apparent disagreement, both scholarly divides commonly agree that the proliferation of small arms poses serious challenges to the sustenance of peace and stability of any society. They further assert that, the availability of small arms has direct influence on the escalation and sustenance of insecurity (Uwa & Anthony, 2015). United Nations Security Council 2015 resolution noted that *“illicit transfer, destabilising accumulation and misuse of small arms and light weapons in many regions of the world continue to pose threats to international peace and security, cause significant loss of life, and contribute to instability and insecurity”*. The critical challenge is that, although, these illegal arms are relatively controlled, they are used very efficiently in executing different levels of lethal violence in Nigeria.

Previous survey on this subject-matter (Nte, 2011; Abdullahi, 2015; Ukwaiyi, Adewoyin, Okpa, 2018; Ukwaiyi, Adewoyin, John, Ofem, 2017; Ukwaiyi, Okpa, Adewoyin, Angioha, Udom, 2017; Okpa, & Ukwaiyi, 2017; Adeniyi, Eneji, Okpa, 2019) had supported the argument that small arms are very efficiently in prosecuting different levels of lethal violence in Nigeria. It is against this background that national, regional, and international efforts have been sustained in eliminating armed violence through continual review of arms regulation. Similarly, different frameworks for controlling and preventing arms proliferation has been designed and implemented by various international organizations. In Nigeria, little is known about the true relationship between arms proliferation and the dynamics of violent crimes that they promote. It is against this backdrop, that this paper x-rays the nexus between small and light arms epidemic, violent crimes, and national security in Nigeria.

## **2. Sources of illegal small arms and light weapons in Nigeria**

Sources of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria are varied and many. However, Abdullahi (2015) classified them into three. Namely, internal, cross border smuggling, and security black racketeering.

### **A. Internal manufacturing**

Most of the legitimate and illicit small arms in circulation within the country are locally manufactured. The government of Nigeria established the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON). This Corporation is legally empowered to produce arms and ammunitions in the country, mainly for use by the military and the police. Given the legal status of its mandate, this does not constitute a significant source of illicit small arms. Other internal sources of small arms are the unlicensed local craftsmen found across different parts of the country. This group of individuals produce a substantial quantity of illicit guns in circulation in the country. The clandestine nature of their activities negates due diligence, transparency, and regulation

as required by international standards. It also makes products difficult to trace and makes the SALW position of Nigeria opaque.

### **B. Cross border smuggling**

Cross-border smuggling constitutes a major source of SALW proliferation. Even though, Nigeria procures arms from other countries for her legitimate use in connection with state security obligations, Nigeria is yet vulnerable to illicit SALW infiltration from abroad because of her geographical location. Reportedly, the three most notorious arms smuggling frontiers are Idi Iroko and Seme in the South Western States of Ogun and Lagos; the Niger Delta regions, and the border post in the north-eastern region, are seen as aiding smuggling. The increased number of potential suppliers arising from the end of the cold war, and weak international controls of armament flows, are contributory to the spread of SALW. These factors have created opportunities for militant groups and other private actors to access sophisticated SALW previously accessible only by members of the armed forces.

### **C. Security black racketeering**

A large number of illicit firearms consist of leakages from members of the armed forces and the police both serving and retired. This includes the remnants from the Nigerian Civil War and leakages from returnees of peacekeeping operations.

## **3. Types of arms market**

With respect to the sale and acquisition of armament, there are three types of markets, known as white, grey (mixture of black and white), and black markets.

### **A. The white market**

The white market corresponds to the sale and acquisition of arms by authorized private manufacturers or government-owned arms manufacturing companies. Thus, both the purchase and sale, as well as, the final destination of these arms is legal.

### **B. Grey market**

In the grey market, the initial sale and distribution is carried out through legal channels, by a government company or a private company authorized to make the sale. However, the final destination may be an illegal or illegitimate organization or actor. Characteristic of grey market transactions, and specifically of these two cases, is that they usually involve the acquisition of high volumes of weapons. The weapons are usually purchased from government companies or from the armed forces for whom it is inefficient to negotiate and carry out transactions for smaller quantities of armament and ammunition. The grey market transactions involving the acquisition of arms manufactured by government companies, or derived from the arms surplus of those countries, indeed are an important source of weapons for the illegal armed groups in Nigeria.

### **C. Black market**

The black market is that in which the whole transaction, that is the sale, distribution, and final destination, is carried out illegally, whether it is done among unauthorized actors, or whether it takes place outside the legal channels. The main source of illegal armament for the subversive groups in Nigeria is the black market. This implies that the main suppliers of arms to those groups are illegal arms traffickers. Within the black-market weapons there may be different sources, even if they end up being sold by illegal dealers. With this in mind, it is important to distinguish between the international black market and the domestic black market. In the first case, members of the illegal armed groups or their support networks contact international arms traffickers, whether in Nigeria or abroad, to begin the negotiation process. The main source of illegal armament for the subversive groups in Colombia is the black market. This implies that the main suppliers of arms to those groups are illegal arms traffickers. Within the black-market weapons may have a different source, even if they end up being sold by illegal dealers. With this in mind it is important to distinguish between the international black market and the domestic black market. (repetition; something seems to be missing-from the phrase, In the first case, what about the second case?). The grey market and, especially, the black market are the major sources for the acquisition of armament, accounting for close to 80% of the total of illegal arms that enter the Nigerian market every year.

### **4. Factors that promote small arms and light weapons proliferation in Nigeria**

Nte (2011), identified the following factors as being responsible for the spread of small arms and light weapons in Nigeria, they are:

#### **A. Simplicity and longevity**

As result of their relatively flexible nature, individuals without formal training in the use of firearms can easily manipulate these weapons. This underscores the reason why militant groups, insurgent groups, armed robbers, kidnappers, and, even, cult groups use them in their daily operations as demonstrated in many volatile parts of Nigeria such as North East Nigeria, the Niger Delta Region and Eastern Nigeria. In addition, they require little maintenance and logistic support and can remain operational for very long periods. In terms of durability (or longevity), Klare and Boutwell (2010) in agreement with Nte (2011), observed that the lifespan of SALW makes them a constant threat to the society in which they are, especially, if they are present in large numbers. With relatively little or no maintenance depending on the conditions to which it is exposed, the AK-47 rifle, can stay operational for 20 to 40 years (Nte, 2011).

#### **B. Cheap (Affordability) and easy accessibility**

The production of SALW does not required difficult or hi-tech capacity because they are produced for military, police, and civilian usage. These weapons are relatively cheap

because they are produced and supplied in large scale all over the world, and they are accessible to any and everybody, with almost no form of restriction.

### **C. Portability and easy to conceal**

Small Arms and Light Weapon can be moved from one place to another by a single person or by a light vehicle. They can, thus, be smuggled quite easily from one place to another. According to Ayissi and Ibrahima (2005), most of the small arms imported into Nigeria are sometimes hidden in clothing, vehicles or kitchen utensils because of their portable nature.

### **D. Lethality**

Though many, SALW are quite simplistic in nature, their lethality has increased making it possible for a single militant, terrorist or armed robber to constitute a big threat to an entire society. Today's assault rifles and other automatic weapons can fire up to several hundred rounds a minute. An AK-47 assault rifle can release 600 rounds per minute as long as the trigger remains pressed down and when being operated in automatic mode. Its maximum range lies between 800 to 1000 meters, but its accuracy is guaranteed when used by a trained marksman with the range of 400 to 600 meters.

## **5. The nexus between small arms and light weapons epidemic (or proliferation), violent crimes, and national security in Nigeria**

According to Emmanuel (2013), the illicit proliferation of SALW has had a dramatic impact on peace and security in Nigeria, threatening not only the existence of the state, but also the livelihoods of millions of people across the country. Nigeria as a country has experienced some of the most devastating effects of the proliferation of SALW as a result of spill over effect of the recent crises in Libya, Syria and Mali, as well as, unresolved internal conflicts in different parts of the country, especially in the North-eastern and Niger Delta regions. Although, Nigeria's problem with SALWs is not new, its increasing availability in the last decade has helped stoke a fiery wave of insurgencies, ethno-religious conflicts, cross-border banditry, rampaging killer herdsmen, kidnapping, armed robbery and other violent crimes. Arms build-up has fuelled violence in different parts of Nigeria-especially, communal clashes and ethno-religious conflicts. Between 1999 and April 2010, Nigeria recorded at least 187 ethno-religious conflicts, leading to the death of several thousands of people (Fearon & Laitin, 2010).

These weapons helped to prolong conflicts, induced huge internal population displacement, undermined social peace, and devastated the economic livelihoods of individuals and communities. As a result of recurrent violent conflicts, Nigeria is faced with the herculean task of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable number of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Between 2000 and 2002, for instance, an estimated 1,713,306 persons were displaced by ethno-religious conflicts and, by June 2013, some 1.6 million Nigerians are estimated to have been internally displaced. The January 2010

crisis in Jos displaced over 40,000 persons. Situations of internal displacement undermine human security at individual and community levels. IDPs are usually vulnerable to violent crimes like robbery and rape, and are prone to contracting contagious diseases, due to poor sanitary conditions at the (re)settlement centres.

According to Frey (2004), the impact of Nigeria's SALWs problem on human security is also evident in financial losses induced by conflicts. About 10 major ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 and 2004 cost the Nigerian government over 400 million naira (US\$2.86 million), to cushion the effect of the crises for the victims. Besides, the amount of money that governments spend on security during such crises and their aftermath are huge. In the aftermath of the Jos crisis in early 2010, the Federal Government assisted the Bauchi State government with ₦135 million (US\$900 000) to help resettle or integrate about 30,000 IDPs from neighbouring Plateau State seeking refuge in Bauchi State. These scarce resources could otherwise be used in providing basic services that promote human security and development, such as clean water, education, and healthcare, among others. Beyond the cost to government, individuals lose property and family members.

The loss of property compounds the problems of poverty and deprivation of the affected population (Fwa, 2003). Through the death of family members, arms induced conflicts lead to a deep fracturing of kinship and family structures; many children have been left without parents, husbands without wives, and vice versa (Fwa, 2003; Galale, 2011). When a family unit is dismantled, children suffer and their future well-being is often bleak, as they are denied good parental care. Many end up as social miscreants who contribute to the sustenance of violent crimes. Thus, for every person killed or injured in conflict and crime involving the use of SALWs, there are many more who must cope with the psychological, physical, and economic effects that ensue in the aftermath. In this context, women and children are invariably the hardest hit. In recent times, SALWs proliferation has led to an increase in violent crimes that undermine human security, such as rape, cultism, armed robbery, rampaging killer herdsmen and kidnapping, in most parts of the country. The phenomenon not only encouraged rebel elements or movements to take up arms against their states, it also made peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention very difficult and even dangerous in the country (Galale, 2011).

The availability and accessibility of small arms and light weapons promotes armed violence. The supply of arms stimulates violence instead of dialogue and has many undesirable effects. For example, high levels of armed violence hinder development, causes diversion of local resources, misuse of public money or imposition of the ideology of "*Might is Right*" (Ikejiaku, 2009). The interdependence (or interplay/interaction) of small arms control, security, and development suggests that no meaningful development can take place in an atmosphere, which is conducive to the production, distribution and an almost licensed utilization of small arms by and for all. It prevents people from conducting their legitimate business, leading to reduction in trade and foreign investment. In addition, SALW fuels the illicit trafficking of natural resources such as oil, minerals and timber (Ikejiani-Clark, 2007). This is, especially,



nowhere explained better than in the case of the Niger Delta region, where the deterioration of security is largely informed by the volume of small arms reaching and circulating in the region, the implication is that, it seriously undermines Nigeria's national security in both human and economic terms.

## 6. The way forward

Adewonyi (2016) presented the following suggestions as ways of mitigating the inflow and circulation of small and light weapons in Nigeria, namely that:

- 1) The Federal government should seek cooperation with international bodies with regards to the execution and dedication to bilateral and multilateral accords, code of behaviour and conventions. These bilateral and multilateral accords include, among others; *“the ECOWAS MORATORIUM, the Inter-American Convention against the Illicit Manufacturing of and Trafficking in Firearms, Ammunition and Explosives and the Bamako Declaration on Africa's common position on the illicit proliferation, circulation and trafficking of small arms and light weapons”*. Furthermore, all the conventions and protocols agreement should be forwarded to the National Assembly for inclusion and domestication into our laws.
- 2) Government should actively erect barriers to stem the flow of small arms into the country. Also, border surveillance should be strengthened and sophisticated information and communication technology (ICT) and detective devices should be made available to law enforcement officers at the border. In addition, transparency and accountability should be taking into cognizance in the production and transfer of small arms, as well as, weapons registration, to help stem the massive flow of small arms circulation throughout the country.
- 3) Government and other stakeholders in conflict management should adopt preventive approaches in handling conflicts in the country. This method is interested with coming up with an approach that will identify and deal with the causes, as well as, reduce the occurrence of armed violence across Nigeria. The preventive approach should take cognizance of the causes of armed violence, this will lead to the establishment laws to curtail it. Also, the management of land by government should be fully implemented to check communal conflict caused by land dispute. Furthermore, government should automatically take over disputed land from communities to avoid further killing and destruction of properties.
- 4) Political office holders should respect the sanctity of human life. Political violence, the act of thuggery and snatching of ballot boxes during elections, should be discouraged among politicians and other stakeholders in the electoral system. The National Orientation Agency (NOA), should intensify its enlightenment campaign, orientation, political education and mobilisation during the period of election. The teaching of civic education should be encouraged in our schools. This will help the students inculcate the virtues of democratic governance and traditions, and to avoid ethno-religious bigotry in political involvement.

- 5) Furthermore, on the issue of standards, an international treaty that provides criteria on exports is needed, in order to prevent arms from getting into the hands of abusers of human rights and international humanitarian law. International standards that determine eligibility requirements for arms exports would prevent arms from entering the illegal market and from falling into the hands of those that are likely to divert or use them for nefarious purposes.

## 7. Conclusion

From the human security point of view, the availability and accessibility of small arms and light weapons increases the risk of gun violence in a way that potentially infringes on individuals' freedom, their rights to life and make security complicated. It is a general assumption that the presence of small arms lacks (sparks) the capability of igniting conflict. Conversely, the prevalence of small arms and light weapons does make a significant difference to the way tensions are managed. There is strong evidence both in countries at peace and in areas of conflict, that the easy availability and accessibility of small arms tends to escalate and prolong violence and increases the lethality of violent encounters. Regulating civilian possession of weapons in itself will not eradicate violence and it is certainly not a panacea (both sentences are in the negative; but will certainly curtail armed violence and criminality to the barest minimum). However, a reduction in the availability of firearms can reduce the lethality of violent confrontations and reduce its negative implications on national security.

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